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Ex-CIA chief tells panel of plots to topple Castro

WASHINGTON (UPI)—Former CIA Director Richard Helms said yesterday he now regrets he did not tell the Warren Commission about the secret U.S. plots to get rid of Fidel Castro.

But Helms—addressing one of the most controversial issues in the John F. Kennedy assassination probe—also testified that the anti-Castro plotting of the late 1950s and early 60s was "a government-wide operation" known to many top officials, including Kennedy himself.

He said any of these men could have informed the Warren panel of a crucial background fact it never had in its deliberations—that the U.S. government, under Dwight D. Eisenhower and Kennedy, had plotted Castro's downfall and even his murder.

It has since been learned that Castro knew about some of these efforts. Conspiracy theorists argue he may have had Kennedy killed in revenge, and that the Warren investigators at least should have been informed of this background.

'Never occurred to me'

"It never occurred to me," Helms said in testimony before the House Assassinations Committee.

"Then it was a mistake?" he was asked.

"Absolutely," he replied, and added that, if he had the chance to do it again, "I would have taken all the documents and put them on the Warren Commission's desk."

Helms, who was a deputy CIA chief involved in clandestine operations at the time of Kennedy's 1963 murder, said he would not take "sole blame" for keeping the Warren Commission in the dark, however.

"They were known to the attorney general (Robert Kennedy), the secretary of defense (Robert McNamara), the assistant to the president (presumably, national security adviser McGeorge Bundy), the National Security Council," Helms said.

"All kinds of people knew. It was a government-wide operation to get rid of Castro."

Although the Senate Intelligence Committee concluded in 1975 that there was no proof any president knew of the assassination plots, Helms said Kennedy knew and President Lyndon B. Johnson knew as well. The Castro murder plots reportedly continued into the mid-60s, with Mafia figures aiding the CIA efforts.

Helms said he had informed Johnson of the anti-Castro efforts on or about May 10, 1967.

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WASHINGTON: Former CIA director Richard Helms testifying before the House Assassinations Committee.